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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**PSC CHANGES NAME OF TELEPHONE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

LINCOLN - Two programs providing financial assistance for telephone service have a new name in Nebraska.

The Nebraska Public Service Commission has combined the Lifeline and Link-Up programs under one name. Beginning May 1, the combined programs will be called the Nebraska Telephone Assistance Program (NTAP) to avoid confusion with private sector programs, which use similar names.

The program formerly known as Lifeline reduces telephone company's rates, while the other service, previously known as Link-Up, pays half of installation charges up to \$30 for local telephone service. To qualify for the programs, recipients must qualify for one of five programs: Medicaid, Food Stamps, Supplemental Security Income, Federal Public Housing Assistance, or Low-Income Home Energy Assistance.

In establishing the programs under the new name of the Nebraska Telephone Assistance Program, the Commission noted that there will be no interruption of existing benefits upon the change of program names.

Commissioner Rod Johnson of Sutton said the new name more accurately reflects what the program seeks to do. Part of the funds used in the Nebraska program is derived from the Nebraska Universal Service Fund (NUSF). The majority of other monies used in the assistance program come from the federal government.

Johnson said, "The Commission is pleased that it is able to provide assistance with basic telephone service for individuals across the state who may experience financial hardships. About 95 percent of Nebraska households have telephone service, and this program is one of the reasons the number is that high."

Johnson also noted that the Commission, which supervises the program because it administers the Universal Service Fund, would work closely with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services in the next six months to reach out to individuals who may qualify for NTAP funds, but who currently are not enrolled.

A mailing to persons who receive services from Health and Human Services, but currently do not benefit from the telephone assistance program, will be made to encourage them to examine whether they might be eligible for NTAP. The Commission is working on a Spanish language translation of the letter.

Persons who wish to apply for NTAP funds must do so with the Public Service Commission which may be reached toll-free at 1-800-526-0017 or in Lincoln at 471-3101. Applications, however, must be submitted in writing, Johnson said.

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